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ABSTRACT

Seven successful and seven unsuccessful employment interviews were videotaped and analyzed to discover how communicative behaviors grounded in rhetorical theory contributed to applicant success. The employers completed pre and postinterview questionnaires that helped to assess the effects of the interviews and to control the effects of the applicants' varying backgrounds. The extent to which the applicants exploited their potentials coincided substantially with their actual success in the interviews. In almost every case, the applicants' rhetorical choices during the interviews were the critical factors contributing to success or failure. The behaviors that consistently associated with rhetorical success centered around six basic principles: to convey positive images, to identify with the listeners, to offer well-supported arguments, to organize thoughts coherently, to phrase ideas in clear and appropriate language, and to deliver messages effectively. Examples of specific communication behaviors during the 14 interviews showed how the successful applicants exhibited the six rhetorical principles much more in their interviews than did the unsuccessful applicants. (RL)

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The Rhetorical Dimensions of Employment Interviews: An Investigation of Communicative Behaviors Contributing to Applicant Success

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The Rhetorical Dimensions of Employment Interviews: An Investigation of Communicative Behaviors Contributing to Applicant Success

Employment interviews are frequent and important communicative events for job applicants. Despite their practical significance, little is known about the communicative correlates of applicant success in these situations. Although lists of interviewing "do's and don'ts" are abundant, the lists usually treat the applicants' communication in a superficial manner. That is, although applicants are advised frequently to wear coats and ties and not to slouch in their chairs, rarely are they advised to choose certain kinds of images, audience appeals, supporting materials, organizational patterns, styles, and deliveries.

This study assumes that some aspects of rhetorical theory provide a basis for analysis of the communication in employment interviews. The persuasive nature of the interview is implicit in almost all definitions of this communicative event.[1] Although some scholars have recognized that employment interviews are communicative situations, no scholar has viewed the applicant primarily as a rhetor. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and analyze communicative behaviors grounded in rhetorical theory that might contribute to applicant success during employment interviews.

The critical object consisted of fourteen initial employment interviews involving college seniors who applied for the position of Merchandise Trainee at Lazarus Department Stores or Account Executive or Copywriter at Keller Crescent Advertising Agency.[2] All of the interviews took place at the Indiana University Business Placement Office during the spring of 1978. Seven of the interviews represented instances of rhetorical success;

the other seven represented instances of rhetorical failure. In order to determine rhetorical success and failure, the employers completed short questionnaires prior to the interviews composed of five-point scales measuring their reactions to the applicants' educational backgrounds, work experiences, personalities, and levels of motivation as these factors were reflected in the interviewees' applications. The employers were asked, also, whether or not they would hire these individuals. Following the interviews, the employers filled out these questionnaires again. By substracting the scores on the post-interview questionnaires from those on the pre-interview questionnaires, it was possible to assess the effects of the interviews while controlling for the varying backgrounds of the applicants. Candidates were considered rhetorically successful if the differences were plus two or more; they were considered rhetorically unsuccessful if the differences were minus two or more.[3] The extent to which these applicants exploited their potentials (their rhetorical success) coincided almost completely with their actual success in the interviews as the successful and unsuccessful candidates for each position possessed amazingly similar backgrounds. In almost every case, the applicants' rhetorical choices during the interviews were the critical factors in determining their success or failure.

As rhetorical theory provided the theoretical framework for the study, I examined a representative body of rhetorical works in order to identify prescriptive generalizations growing out of rhetorical theory.[4] The behaviors consistently identified with rhetorical success centered around six basic principles: speakers were advised to convey positive images of themselves, to identify with their listeners, to offer well supported arguments, to organize their thoughts coherently, to phrase their ideas in clear and appropriate language, and to deliver their messages effectively.

These principles were formulated to define success in a formal public speaking situation. In using the principles to hypothesize about the employment interview, I adopted the terminology of the employment interview rather than the terminology of the public speech. For example, when the rhetorical literature asserted that speakers should identify with their listeners, I changed the prediction to, "Applicants should identify with employers." Each of the six principles was composed of several interacting behaviors. A total of ninety-three specific behaviors that demonstrated these general principles in operation were identified and translated into employment terminology.[5]

Because the interviews were video taped and audio recorded and the verbal portion was transcribed, a thorough examination of the applicants' communication was possible. Each of the ninety-three behaviors was applied to each of the fourteen interviews. Those behaviors that did not relate to any of the interviews were discarded. For example, figures of speech were used infrequently by both successful and unsuccessful applicants. Thus, the hypothesis that applicants would increase their chances for success in employment interviews if they employed figures of speech was dismissed. Both rhetorically successful and rhetorically unsuccessful applicants observed some of the formulations. Members of both groups, for instance, employed many self-references. Self-references, then, was not considered a distinguishing rhetorical feature of a successful selection interview.

The successful and unsuccessful applicants differed with regard to each of the six basic rhetorical principles identified earlier. That is, in comparison to the unsuccessful applicants, the successful candidates identified more with employers, offered more support for arguments, organized their thoughts more coherently, phrased their ideas more clearly,

and delivered their messages more effectively.[6] By performing all of these behaviors, the successful applicants established positive images of themselves in the minds of the employers.

The unsuccessful interviewees could not identify with the employers as they lacked well-defined career goals. One applicant, for example, changed her ideal position six times during the course of the interview. At the beginning of the interview, she expressed interest in a job involving graphics and layout. She, then, said that she wanted to be a product manager, and, then, she indicated that retail buying was a potentially attractive career field. In the middle of the interview, she remarked that she "wouldn't mind a sales job."[7] This, indeed, was an important statement as she was applying for a sales position. Still later, this same applicant announced that she might go to graduate school to earn a Master's degree. Finally, she indicated that she would like to become involved in market research. The other unsuccessful applicants did not undergo as many career goal changes as this girl did, but they, too, expressed a lack of certainty about the kind of job that would satisfy their career needs and desires. Most indicated that they were interviewing with many different types of companies and that they were considering graduate school as well as work opportunities. While a few expressed interest in a particular field, they still lacked specificity regarding the particular company within the field that they preferred. The rhetorically unsuccessful applicants seemed to regard the interviewing process as a way to gather information about a wide variety of positions and organizations. One writer in the Career Planning field called such thinking a "grocery store mentality." The applicant, this author explained, is saying, "Just tell me what's on the grocery shelf of work opportunities and I will choose the one that is most attractively packaged."[8] Such a

mentality places the applicant during the interview in the role of screener, not screenee. In fact, over half of the rhetorically unsuccessful applicants drew attention to this screening role: they were interviewing with Lazarus or Keller Crescent, they said, in order to find out what opportunities these companies could offer them so that they might compare this information with what other companies told them.

All of the rhetorically successful applicants possessed career goals that were specific and were consistent with the positions for which they were applying. They emphasized that they wanted careers, not jobs, and they expressed interest in working and disinterest in going to graduate school. Further, they indicated why they wanted to pursue their chosen careers. The applicants seeking employment with Lazarus, for example, spoke enthusiastically of the continual responsibility, quick pace, and constant challenge afforded by careers in retailing. Moreover, the successful applicants expressed preferences to work for the organizations with whom they were interviewing over other competing organizations. The successful Lazarus applicants, for instance, cited Lazarus' reputation, attitude toward customers, store layout, and location as reasons for wanting to work for the company. The rhetorically successful interviewees referred directly to Lazarus and Keller Crescent four times as often as did the rhetorically unsuccessful applicants, and they referred directly to the interviewers three times as often.

As the rhetorically unsuccessful applicants did not express a direct interest in working for Lazarus or Keller Crescent, it is not surprising that they made almost no complimentary remarks about these organizations. In fact, occasionally the applicants spoke about the firms derogatorily, such as the applicant who said during her interview with Lazarus, "I'm not sure that I want to work for a retailer in the Midwest. I think I might

want to go to New York where retailing is really at." The successful applicants, by comparison, often praised the employers tactfully. The following statements made during two different Keller Crescent interviews typify the specificity and highly positive nature of these compliments:

> What impresses me most about Keller Crescent is the fact that you are a full service agency. That certainly provides your account executives with a definite competitive edge in the market place.
>
> I've been interested in this company for so long that it's killing me! I was astounded when I learned that there was such a large and reputable agency in Evansville, Indiana.

Usually the successful applicants indicated that their positive attitudes toward Lazarus and Keller Crescent were influenced by favorable comments offered by employees of these firms. As a group, the successful applicants possessed a greater number of human contacts than the unsuccessful applicants, and they used these contacts to their advantage.

The successful applicants received information about Lazarus and Keller Crescent from informed people, and they used written materials to research the organizations, as well. A few mentioned having gone to one or more libraries specifically to gather information about Lazarus or Keller Crescent; others spoke of particular journals or brochures that provided them with important facts. All seemed to possess a realistic and thorough understanding of the responsibilities involved in the positions they sought and a large amount of specific information about the respective firms. In contrast to the extensive research conducted by the rhetorically successful applicants, the rhetorically unsuccessful candidates rarely displayed any knowledge of the position or organization and admitted at times that they lacked this information.

In addition to approaching the interviews with varying attitudes toward the potential employers, the applicants differed in the reinforcement

given to the interviewers' ideas during the interactions. For instance, after the employers answered particular questions asked by applicants about the jobs or organizations, the unsuccessful interviewees typically said, "Uh huh," "Okay," or "I see" and continued to ask additional questions. By contrast, the successful applicants demonstrated enthusiastic approval of the employers' information. Exclamatory remarks like, "Boy, I'm really excited to see that," "Oh, wow," "I understand completely," and "That's great" permeated the discourse of these applicants. Additionally, almost all of the successful candidates gave nonverbal support to the employers' ideas by nodding their heads affirmatively while the employers spoke.

The successful and unsuccessful applicants not only reacted differently to the employers' ideas, but they differed also in the extent to which they revealed possession of those qualities that the employers desired in them. One brochure that Lazarus gave to potential employees contained an exercise that asked readers to rate their potential as retail executives. The qualities listed as essential for success in the retailing field included the possession of analytical skills, creativity, decisiveness, flexibility, aggressiveness, initiative, leadership ability, and organizational skills. The interviewers for Keller Crescent considered whether account executive candidates were self-motivated, goal-oriented, and money-motivated and whether potential Keller Crescent copywriters were creative, intelligent, and flexible. Most rhetorically unsuccessful applicants did not indicate that they possessed these qualities. Occasionally, they even admitted that they lacked one or more of these traits. For instance, one of the applicants interviewing with Lazarus cited lack of initiative as a major weakness in her personality. The rhetorically successful applicants, on the other hand, usually included the possession

of these desired qualities when describing personal strengths as the following self-description offered by a Keller Crescent applicant illustrates: "I'm very goal-oriented. Whether at work, in class, or on a basketball court, I set goals and work toward them. I'm also very self-motivated. In fact, my supervisor at Cleverly-Lockhart used to tease me because I would drive myself and didn't need his supervision."

In addition to discovering what traits the employers desired through researching the organizations, the successful applicants also learned this information by sensing tacit employer cues in which the interviewers indicated these likes and dislikes. Like most interviewers, the employers in this study sometimes phrased their questions in such a way that the characteristics that they wanted the applicants to possess were implied in the questions. For example, when the interviewer from Lazarus asked some of the candidates, "How are your quantitative, analytical, and problem-solving skills?" she was informing these interviewees indirectly that the possession of these types of skills was important to her. Surprisingly, even though the "correct" answers were implied in the questions, the applicants in this study responded in markedly different ways to these types of questions. Further, the manner in which they responded coincided with their rhetorical success. Answers of the unsuccessful applicants were characterized by insufficient proof and by a high degree of qualification. To the above question concerning the possession of quantitative, analytical, and problem-solving skills, for example, one applicant remarked, "They are okay, I guess. Math and that kind of thing is not really my bag, I guess." The successful applicants, by contrast, used language that was unqualified and unequivocal and offered specific evidence to support their strong claims. For example, to the question, "Do you feel tough enough for this type of work?" one

Lazarus applicant replied without hesitation, "Definitely!" She proceeded by recounting specific tough decisions that she had made during her internship at a store comparable to Lazarus.

The successful applicants neutralized negatives in their backgrounds with the same forcefulness of language and specificity of evidence that they used to respond to employer cues. Compare the following responses given to the question, "You have a 2.6 grade point average? Is that current?"

> [Response from unsuccessful applicant]: Yeah. I don't think grades mean anything. Professors give you good grades if they like you and bad grades if they don't.
>
> [Response from successful applicant]: Yes, it's current. I had some social problems my sophomore year which reflected in my grades, but I got them worked out and my grades have improved tremendously since then. Last semester I earned a 3.73, and my grades so far this semester are A's also.

It was coincidental that both applicants had maintained identical grade point averages. The unsuccessful applicant blamed others for these grades which, ironically, were not that poor. While the applicant's argument about the meaninglessness of grades might have had some merit, the interviewer would not have asked the question if she believed that grades were completely useless. The applicant's answer also raised questions about her personality: according to her logic, her low grades meant that most of her professors disliked her. The successful applicant neutralized the potential negative rather than raising possible additional objections. She assumed responsibility for her past performance while using concrete evidence to focus the employer's attention on the present and future, rather than on the past.

The successful applicants not only employed evidence to respond forcefully to cues offered by the employers and to overcome possible weaknesses in their backgrounds, but they also clarified, amplified, and substantiated their assertions by means of various types of support. The

unsuccessful applicants relied almost exclusively on personal experiences and explanations to back up their ideas. The successful applicants also used personal experiences and explanations, but they used other supporting devices, as well. For instance, these applicants frequently employed factual and hypothetical illustrations, comparisons and contrasts, and statistics. Additionally, testimony from current and former supervisors and co-workers, from past and present Lazarus and Keller Crescent employees, from professors and friends, and from company literature and other written materials were offered as proof. Various supporting devices not only substantiated the successful applicants' claims, but the devices also made their messages more interesting. Occasionally, the applicants added interest and enjoyment through relevant and appropriate humor. Laughter frequently interrupted the dialogue of the successful interviews; there was almost no laughter in the unsuccessful interviews.

Quantity and variety of supporting evidence was consistent with the elaborate and complete nature of the information covered. Usually the unsuccessful applicants did not expand their answers. Fifty-eight percent of one Keller Crescent applicant's responses, for example, contained less than ten words; twenty-nine percent consisted of merely "um hum," "no," "okay," or "yeah." By contrast, all of the successful applicants used extensive detail, treating their experiences and abilities thoroughly.

Answers to employer questions were not the only aspects of the successful applicants' communication that were specific and comprehensive. These applicants also asked the employers specific questions about a wide variety of issues. The following questions posed to the interviewer from Lazarus are typical:

> What brands/makers do you carry in the junior size of women's wear?
>
> What is the reason for your extensive point of purchase displays? Are they means of motivating customers to start becoming innovative?

How often do you have promotional activities?

Both successful and unsuccessful applicants often questioned the companies' training programs and expansion plans. As a group, the rhetorically successful applicants also asked frequently about the organizations' clientele, turnover rates, and recruiting procedures. They also asked personal questions about the employers' backgrounds. The successful applicants often phrased their questions in the first person. For example, instead of asking, "What are the duties and responsibilities of the job?" these applicants more frequently worded such a question, "What would be my duties and responsibilities?" By wording questions in the first person, these applicants indirectly expressed confidence that they would receive job offers from Lazarus and Keller Crescent. Psychologically, this phrasing also forced the employers to imagine the applicants in the jobs.

If the unsuccessful applicants did not elaborate on their answers and did not ask many questions, what did they talk about? The answer is that they often dealt with topics that were unrelated to their ability to be successful at Lazarus or Keller Crescent. The first one percent of one unsuccessful applicant's discourse, for example, was devoted to a discussion of the origin of his name; the next five percent concerned my taping of the interview. The applicant spent seventeen percent of his time asking general questions about what an account executive is and what Keller Crescent does and nineteen percent more time talking about his family and the company where his father works. Over half of the applicant's message, fifty-six percent of his words, dealt with bicycling. The remaining two percent of the interview was devoted to exiting behaviors, such as expressions of gratitude.

Compared to the successful applicants, the unsuccessful applicants did not have as much time to cover their abilities and experiences

thoroughly. Although each interview was scheduled to last thirty minutes, the unsuccessful interviews averaged only twenty-five minutes of the allotted time. By contrast, interviews of the successful applicants averaged twenty-nine and one-half minutes in length. In addition to possessing more interview time, the successful applicants spoke a greater percentage of the period than their unsuccessful counterparts. Only thirty-seven percent of the words in unsuccessful interviews were spoken by the applicants, while successful applicants talked fifty-five percent of the time. Successful applicants not only spoke more, but they also controlled the interviews to a greater extent. They initiated fifty-six percent of their comments as opposed to the unsuccessful applicants, who initiated only thirty-six percent of their remarks. Thus, the successful applicants behaved as active participants in the interviews; the unsuccessful applicants behaved more as passive respondents.

The more active role of the rhetorically successful applicants was apparent from the very beginning of the interviews. Whereas the unsuccessful applicants needed prodding by the interviewers in order to communicate freely, the successful applicants took control from the start of the interviews. The first page of the successful interview transcripts revealed applicants initiating comments that expressed confidence in their abilities and strong desires to work at Lazarus or Keller Crescent. Beginning discourse of the unsuccessful applicants was marked, instead, by much uninteresting information given in direct response to employer questions. Further, the applicants did not relate this information to their abilities to be successful at Lazarus or Keller Crescent.

The rhetorically successful candidates carried their tendencies to be assertive, specific, and thorough to the conclusion of the interviews. Although the employers terminated all of the interviews, the successful

applicants usually offered a summary statement where they repeated their qualifications and restated their strong desires to work for Lazarus or Keller Crescent. The last substantive comment made by the following Lazarus interviewee typifies the summary statements offered by the successful applicants:

> I have had good retailing experience, as you know, and I love the retailing field. It's in my blood. I'm motivated. I enjoy working under pressure. I like a quick pace. I know that retailing isn't a nine to five job. You put in a lot of hours, but that's what I thrive on. And, as I've said, I've always been so impressed with Lazarus. It seems like the perfect place for me to apply my talents.

Toward the end of the successful interviews, the applicants also tried to get the employers to specify when they would make their selection decisions. One applicant asked directly, "When can I expect to hear from you?" Another exclaimed, "I hope I passed! When will I know?" Only one of the rhetorically unsuccessful applicants offered a summary statement and none attempted to make the employers commit themselves to decision timetables.

Language choices of the rhetorically successful interviewees were also more active and concrete than were the word choices of the rhetorically unsuccessful candidates. The unsuccessful applicants used many ambiguous terms such as "pretty good" or "fairly well." They often prefaced their remarks with "I think," "I guess," and "I feel." Such constant qualification made them appear indecisive, unassertive, and lacking in confidence and competence. One applicant's description of a previous summer sales job illustrates this point. She remarked, "I guess maybe I got kind of general experience in retailing, maybe you could say." Sixty-two percent of the verbs employed by the unsuccessful applicants were active; successful applicants averaged seventy-four percent active verbs.

The language of the successful applicants was not only more precise and active than that of the unsuccessful applicants, but it was more

positive and interesting, as well. The successful applicants frequently used the word "yes" and only occasionally used the word "no." They employed many terms that evoked positive connotations such as "advantage," "success," "enjoyment," "progress," and "improvement" and only a few words that evoked negative images. The unsuccessful applicants frequently used the word "no," and they often chose words that expressed negative connotations such as "awful," "difficult," and "dull." Word choices of the unsuccessful applicants were simple and lacking in variety. While most of the successful applicants' words were monosyllabic, familiar, and of Anglo-Saxon origin, they occasionally included some colorful terms to make their messages interesting.

The rhetorically successful applicants frequently employed technical jargon. For example, those interviewing with Lazarus mentioned a "point of purchase display," "invoice," "flighter," "purchase journal," "inventory shortage," "NCR charge," and "price sheet." The applicants interviewing to become copywriters at Keller Crescent spoke of a "broadside sheet of paper," "two-column approach," "direct mail," and "publicity release." Almost no examples of technical language were found in the transcripts of the unsuccessful applicants.

The successful and unsuccessful applicants not only employed different words, but they combined words into sentence units in different ways. The rhetorically unsuccessful applicants often jumbled thoughts together using "and" in place of meaningful transitions. This jumbling resulted in many long, disjointed, and complex sentences that often detracted from the clarity of the messages, as the following sentence taken from a Keller Crescent interview illustrates:

> [Explaining how his family moved from Russia to Evansville, Indiana]: Ah, well, my uncle, well I have two of them here, one in New York and one in, uh, well he did live in Boonville,

> now he lives in, uh, Newburgh and, uh, we came over and stayed in New York about a week, and my Dad just really didn't like New York at all because it's just, well, Poland and Russia, you know, the cities are big, but they're not New York City, and, uh, he was, uh, country-folk, a farmer, you know, out in that aspect of it, and, uh, so he didn't really like it and he came here to Boonville and my uncle, you know, had some friends so he got a job here and then he finally got a job in Evansville, and so we stayed in Evansville ever since.

Because the unsuccessful applicants combined words together in awkward ways, the resulting sentences usually contained some unclear referents and several grammatical errors. One cannot expect complete specificity of referents and correctness of grammar in transcripts taken from audio tapes of conversations, but the frequency of mistakes in these transcripts was notable. The successful applicants, by contrast, usually spoke in short, simple sentences, made their referents clear, and adhered to accepted rules of grammar.

Delivery factors accounted for some additional differences between the communication of the rhetorically successful and rhetorically unsuccessful applicants. The unsuccessful applicants tended to speak quite softly and slowly. They exhibited little vocal variety; thus, their voices often sounded monotonous. These applicants used few gestures, preferring, instead, to clasp their hands in their laps. They maintained very stiff postures, sitting with their backs pressed firmly against their chairs. They exhibited many nervous mannerisms such as laughing inappropriately, coughing, shaking a foot, combing their hair, and scratching their noses. Sometimes they paused for unusually long periods of time; at other times, they rambled on when they should have paused. Often these applicants vocalized their pauses, punctuating their thoughts with "you know," "uh," and "um." They maintained poor eye contact, looking at the floor, desk, and ceiling. They occasionally yawned and generally seemed tired and disinterested.

Delivery of the successful applicants was markedly different. Most spoke rapidly and forcefully, although they also varied their rate, force, volume, and pitch for emphasis. While they vocalized their pauses occasionally, the frequency of this occurrence was not distracting. They articulated distinctly, smiled often, and gestured meaningfully. They maintained postures that were comfortable and natural and often leaned forward in their chairs while speaking and listening. Successful applicants looked directly at the employers without fixating on them and often nodded their heads affirmatively while the employers spoke. These applicants sometimes interrupted the interviewers in order to make comments and did not permit the employers to speak for too long without offering verbal acknowledgements.

Through the behaviors already identified related to identification with employers, support for arguments, organization, style, and delivery, the successful applicants conveyed positive images of themselves while the unsuccessful applicants conveyed neutral or negative images. Specifically, the successful applicants presented themselves as professionally competent and as dynamic individuals.

The successful applicants created the impression of being professionally competent in several ways. Adhering to accepted rules of grammar, refraining from vocalizing pauses, and asking intelligent questions made them appear to be competent people. Referring to contacts in the field of either retailing or advertising and employing technical language made them appear professionally knowledgeable. Other indications that these applicants possessed the abilities necessary for successful performance at Lazarus or Keller Crescent included comprehensive treatment of experiences and abilities, sufficient substantiation of assertions by means of various supporting devices, and effective neutralization of

potential negatives in their backgrounds without raising additional objections. Longer interviews and speaking frequently during the interviews afforded successful applicants greater opportunities to demonstrate their competence than their unsuccessful counterparts possessed.

In addition to portraying themselves as professionally competent, the successful applicants presented themselves as dynamic individuals. They spoke at a rapid rate, gestured meaningfully, and smiled often. Taken as a whole, these delivery characteristics might have led employers to conclude that they were enthusiastic. Initiating comments, interrupting the employers, using unequivocal language, and asking employers to indicate when they would make their hiring decisions might have been interpreted by the interviewers as evidence of the applicants' assertiveness. The successful candidates employed many active verbs, a grammatical construction that stresses dynamic action. Using occasional colorful words, leaning forward in their chairs while speaking and listening, nodding their heads affirmatively while the employers spoke, and maintaining excellent eye contact made these interviewees appear alert and energetic. The successful applicants, in essence, played active roles in the interviews, and this dynamism helped them to establish positive identities.

The establishment of positive images on the part of the successful applicants corresponded with the rhetorical needs of the applicants in these employment interviews. One of the applicants' primary rhetorical problems in these interviews was their need to overcome anonymity. Before the initial interviews, the applicants were unknowns to the employers. Through the interviews, they had to establish identities. If the employers had not been concerned about the applicants' images, the interviews would have been unnecessary. The employers would have based their hiring decisions

upon written information only. Yet, the employers did interview, and one of their reasons for interviewing was to evaluate these applicants as people. The successful applicants, however, not only created images of themselves in the minds of the employers, but they created positive images of themselves, as well. That is, the successful applicants in these employment interviews adopted strategies of ingratiation.[9]

This study concludes, then, that applicants will increase their chances for success in employment interviews if they model their communicative behaviors after the successful Lazarus and Keller Crescent applicants as these applicants were able to ingratiate the employers by adopting these behaviors. As this study was not controlled experimentally, the behaviors are offered here as hypotheses, hypotheses grounded in rhetorical theory. Each behavior needs to be tested in an experimentally controlled setting before the conclusions can be adopted by teachers and theorists.

Several pedagogical implications will evolve if experimenation confirms the hypotheses. The communicative behaviors that enhance applicants' chances for success in employment interviews can be taught to prospective interviewees. Employers can test whether the applicant behaviors that contribute to successful interview performance are the same behaviors that are necessary for successful job performance. Such a process might increase the predictive validity of the employment interview as a selection instrument.

By considering the employment interview rhetorically, this study demonstrated the appropriateness and feasibility of using rhetorical theory as a framework for studying one form of non-public communication. An increased understanding of how rhetoric functioned in this non-traditional context enhanced an understanding of the nature of the rhetorical process. Conversely, rhetorical theory offered unique insights into the communication

that occurred during these employment interviews. By focusing on the applicants' communicative choices more specifically and thoroughly than previous interviewing research, this study demonstrated the extent to which and ways that applicants' rhetorical choices helped them achieve success in the employment interviewing process.

Notes

[1] Almost all definitions of "interviewing" include the words "purposeful" or "goal-directed."

[2] Lazarus is a division of Federated Department Stores, one of the most successful retailing organizations in this country. Keller Crescent is a large advertising agency located in Evansville, Indiana.

[3] For nine applicants, there was little difference between the pre- and the post-interview questionnaires. Thus, these interviews were discarded.

[4] Rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism, and public speaking works were examined. Most of the works consulted viewed rhetoric from a neo-Aristotelian perspective.

[5] While each rhetorical work did not cover each of the behaviors, and while occasionally a work contradicted another work on a particular point, the behaviors identified through this examination of the rhetorical literature are generally accepted by rhetorical scholars.

[6] These principles describe tendencies on the part of the successful and unsuccessful applicants in this study. Enumeration of the principles and of the behaviors that demonstrate the principles does not imply that every applicant in each respective group exhibited the characteristic under examination.

[7] All quotations from the interviews cited throughout this essay are taken from verbatim transcripts. I have not altered the applicants' grammar, even when it was incorrect. Transcribing from oral records always necessitates some arbitrary decisions regarding punctuation. In all cases, I have attempted to capture the essence of the comments as fairly and accurately as possible.

[8] Howard E. Figler, Path: A Career Workbook for Liberal Arts Students (Cranston, R. I.: Carroll Press, 1975), p. 23.

[9] Michael Leff and Gerald Mohrmann view the need to establish positive images as the crucial rhetorical problem of campaign speakers and argue that ingratiation functions as the primary strategy that campaign speakers employ to establish these positive identities. See their essays, "Lincoln at Cooper Union: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Text," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60 (1974), 346-358 and "Lincoln at Cooper Union: A Rationale for Neo-Classical Criticism," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60 (1974), 459-467.